

## Writing the Book on Environmental Health

Environmental health issues affect every person living on the earth, yet many people are not aware of exactly what “environmental health” means, or why they should be interested. So the NIEHS decided to publish a booklet aimed specifically at explaining environmental health to young people. The primary goals of the publication—meant to be a fun and informative teaching aid for schools (it’s written at a sixth-grade reading level)—are to give examples of a number of environmental diseases and tell how they affect everyday people, and also to describe the work that the NIEHS does.

The publication, *Environmental Diseases from A to Z*, is a brightly illustrated, eight-page booklet that features information on environmental diseases from allergies to zinc poisoning. Some of the topics cover general areas of concern, such as job-related illnesses and waterborne diseases. Other topics, such as pneumoconiosis, describe specific diseases that arise from environmental exposures. The booklet is packed with facts, statistics, and even some intriguing bits of trivia about each disease. It also contains pronunciation guides for some of the more complicated disease names.

A first run of 20,000 copies was printed in July. In order to spread word of the booklet to its target audience, the NIEHS posted a press release on the World Wide Web. So far, over 500 respondents—including teachers, students, public health administrators, and reporters—have contacted the NIEHS Office of Communications for more information about the booklet, making it one of the institute’s most popular outreach publications in recent years. A 13-state mailing to science teachers is planned for this winter. The

mailing will be organized by Karen Hoffman, president of the North Carolina Association for Biomedical Research, a nonprofit organization based in Raleigh that, among other efforts, works closely with educators in an effort to foster scientific literacy among North

Carolina schoolchildren. Along with her counterparts in 12 other states, Hoffman will send single copies of the booklet to approximately 13,000 middle school and high school teachers. Each teacher will have the opportunity to request up to 90 additional free copies.

The booklet was written by John Peterson, a public affairs specialist for the NIEHS. William Grigg, director of the Office of Communications and editor of the booklet, came up with the idea of an “A to Z” format.

The illustrations were drawn by Donna McCullough, an artist at *The Washington Post*. Peterson, who had long recognized the need for such a booklet and championed its publication, says that coming up with the single best environmental illness to match each letter of the alphabet was the most difficult challenge in creating the booklet. He searched through medical dictionaries and the NIH Health Information Index (a database of diseases studied by NIH constituents) for suitable topics, and solicited suggestions from scientists at the NIEHS. In the end, each letter was eventually paired with an appropriate entry.

A free copy of *Environmental Diseases from A to Z* may be obtained by writing to the NIEHS Office of Communications, MD EC-12, PO Box 12233, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709, Attention: John Peterson. The booklet may also be requested by sending an e-mail message to [booklet@niehs.nih.gov](mailto:booklet@niehs.nih.gov).

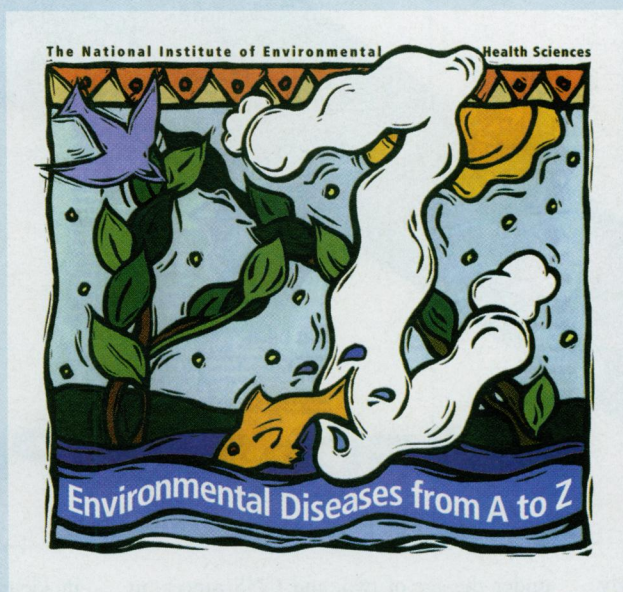


Illustration: Donna W. McCullough